

Secretary of Agriculture Perdue Visits California Avocado Grove

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue toured a California avocado grove on July 15, accompanied by California Avocado Commission (CAC) Chairman John Lamb, CAC President Tom Bellamore and other representatives of the Commission. The grove tour, which took place at Rancho Guejito Avocado Farm in Escondido, was conducted by grower Al Stehly.

“On behalf of California avocado growers, I’d like to thank Secretary Perdue for the time and interest he expressed about our industry during his visit,” said Lamb. “We had a very productive meeting with the Secretary,



Secretary Perdue.

who seemed very interested in helping with labor, water and other issues facing California growers.”

Commission representatives informed the Secretary about California avocado industry modernization in progress, including high-density plantings, managed tree height, salt tolerant varieties and improved water efficiency.

“We expressed to Secretary Perdue the significant challenges growers are having with limited labor availability and let him know that the situation is getting worse with the aging of existing workers and enforcement concerns,” said Bellamore. “California avocado harvest crews are well-compensated, averaging \$18 per hour or greater piece rate,



Secretary Perdue had a sit down meeting with Commission representatives to discuss issues impacting the California avocado industry prior to the field tour.

but with agriculture labor availability approaching crisis levels, the industry needs a flexible guest worker program that allows the existing workforce to remain and one that provides access to new workers.”

Water availability, quality and pricing remain significant concerns for California avocado farmers. Commission representatives emphasized the importance of increased statewide water storage capacity as well as easing Endangered Species Act restrictions to allow greater State Water Project deliveries. Industry representatives also covered trade issues with Secretary Perdue, such as the tremendous increase in avocado volumes coming from imports. Export opportunities were discussed, including the challenges in gaining access to some foreign markets. Bellamore called upon the Secretary to expedite access to China for California avocados.

Secretary Perdue gained a hands-on appreciation of the skill it takes to harvest avocados, using a picking pole to cut an avocado from a tree. After the tour, the Secretary was available for media questions from major networks and local San Diego press.

Rancho Guejito is the only remaining undivided Spanish land grant in California. Avocados have been grown on the property since 2010. 🥑

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